



HELP

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HELPPFILE

DVI adaptor won't fit

Q I have just bought a new computer with an MSI motherboard that has built-in dual monitor support. The problem is that it has one standard VGA connector and one DVI connector, and both my flat-screen LCD monitors have only a VGA plug. I bought a DVI-to-VGA adaptor, but this won't fit as the adaptor has four pins around the flat spade connector but the motherboard DVI connector does not have any holes for these pins.

I have tried to shop around for the right part, but all the adaptors I have found have these four pins. Will it work if I just cut these pins off?

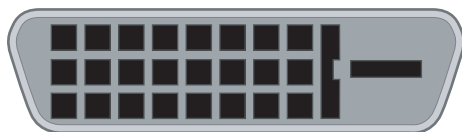
Joe Wheeler

A No, it won't work. As you have discovered, there are two kinds of DVI connector. The more common DVI-I specification includes both digital and analogue signals. The analogue signals, compatible with the old VGA standard, are carried by the four pins next to the flat spade connector. The cheap, widely available DVI-VGA adaptors and cables

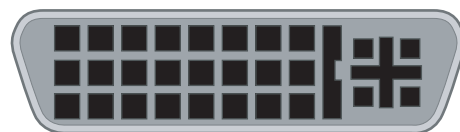
simply connect these pins to the corresponding pins on a 15-pin D-shaped VGA connector.

Your connector, which does not have these four pins, is a DVI-D or digital-only connection. It does not output the analogue signals that an analogue monitor needs. Connecting this to a VGA monitor would require a more expensive digital-to-analogue converter, not just a simple cable. Such converters exist but are hard to find and they're expensive. All those we located cost well over £200. Even a top-of-the-line graphics card would be cheaper.

In addition to the above two types of DVI connector, there is another connector used on certain high-end Nvidia cards. We have found these on some Dell Precision workstations and similar computers from HP. At first glance it looks like a DVI connector, but it just has rows of pins with no spade connector at all. This is a proprietary connection and it needs a special splitter cable, which you can obtain with two standard VGA connectors or two DVI connectors at the other end.



DVI-D connector



DVI-I connector

USB anti-virus detection and removal

Q Can you tell me if there is a product that allows you to scan for viruses via a USB stick, in the same way that Stinger does via a self-booting floppy?

Rik, tekassociates@tiscali.co.uk

A It's a good idea and a lot of people are working on it, but so far we haven't seen a solution we like. The first problem is that the PC to be scanned has to be capable of booting from a USB drive, and not all are. In fact, many computers have no built-in BIOS-level support for USB drives, so these drives can be accessed only after you load an operating system that has drivers for them.

Second, you have to have an operating system that can be installed on a USB flash drive and is sufficiently portable to boot on almost any computer. Windows XP, for example, has to be installed for the specific hardware on which it will run. Microsoft has a special cut-down version of Windows called the Pre-installation Environment, known as PE, but it has made this available only as part of its own Windows Setup CDs.

To get around this, SanDisk, along with other USB drive manufacturers, has developed an operating

system called U3, and a Korean company called Iocell has developed an operating system called C2. Both companies are working with anti-virus software manufacturers to produce versions for the new operating systems. SanDisk has a USB drive with software from Alwil, while Verbatim produces one with a version of McAfee's anti-virus software.

To use U3 or C2, you need to buy a flash drive that comes with the system. You should expect to see more anti-virus software products on a flash drive soon. Meanwhile, it is also possible to boot into DOS from a USB flash drive and then run a DOS-based anti-virus program such as F-Prot for DOS. In order to do this, you need a computer with a BIOS that can boot from USB drives. You may also need to use Bart's MkbT utility (www.nu2.nu/mkbt) to make your USB drive bootable.

F-Prot for DOS is popular because it is free for home users. You can download it from www.f-prot.com/products/home_use/dos. It does not come with an automatic updater, but several people have produced updater programs to keep it up to date. See F-Pup from www.claymania.com/F-pup.exe, P-Check from www.niksoft.at/fp-check or our favourite, AV-Def's Updater from www.overselfresearch.com.



Microsoft Word freezes on startup

Q I have a Dell Dimension 4100 PC running Windows Me. Microsoft Works Suite 2000, of which Word 2000 is a component, was supplied with the package. The system has recently developed a problem with Word.

When I try to open Word, it freezes with the initial screen partly open. If I hit Ctrl-Alt-Del in an attempt to exit the frozen program, I see a box telling me the system is dangerously low on resources and asking whether I wish to terminate WinWord (not responding). The options are Yes, No and Cancel, but none has any effect. I have to hit the reset button.

I have tried uninstalling Word, turning off the PC, restarting and reinstalling Word. This does not cure the problem. I find it hard to believe that I am short of resources. There is very little on the PC. Moreover, the resource meter shows that the system resources are 69 per cent free, the user resources are 69 per cent free and GDI resources are 97 per cent free.

Jerry Giltrow, giltrowlymington@yahoo.co.uk

A The most likely cause is that the default template file has become corrupt. When it tries to load the corrupted information, Word

gets stuck in a never-ending loop until your system resources are exhausted and the whole system has to stop responding.

Search for a file named normal.dot. It should be in a folder called Templates, but the location may vary from one version of Word to another and it may be in a hidden folder. Rename this file to something like normal.bad. Restart Word to automatically recreate the normal.dot file with default values and see if this solves the problem.

It is also possible, but less likely, that another Word file has been corrupted. If you go to Control Panel, Add/Remove programs and click on the entry that includes Microsoft Word, you should be offered an option to Repair. Uninstalling and reinstalling Word or even the whole Works suite leaves behind certain files, including templates. This is why it didn't fix the problem.

You almost certainly need to get the latest Office Service Pack, which fixes lots of bugs, including one that causes this. Office 2000 is now up to Service Pack 3. You can download this from the Office Update website at www.officeupdate.com, even though you only have Word. However, you'll need the original CD that Word came on, one of six Works Suite discs.

Changing AGP aperture size causes problems

Q I have an Asus A7S8X-MX motherboard and I have just installed a new Geforce FX 5500 128MB AGP 8x graphics card on my PC. Everything was fine until I decided to change the graphics aperture size to 128MB in the BIOS. When I saved the settings and tried to reboot the computer, it wouldn't start up at all. It won't respond to me pressing any command keys to access the BIOS settings. Could you please offer some advice?

Marlon Nunes, marlonnunes@orange.net

A I assume you were thinking that the aperture size should be set to the amount of graphics memory on your card, but that is not how it works. The accelerated graphics port (AGP) aperture size is the amount of your main motherboard memory (RAM) that you make available for the AGP card to store textures and other data after its own memory is full. The more memory there is on the card itself, the less you need a large AGP aperture size.

On the other hand, with a more powerful graphics card you obviously plan to run games that will use a lot of textures. If you have plenty of main memory, there should be no harm in setting a large aperture size. The most commonly recommended AGP aperture size is 128MB for all AGP cards with 64MB or more, provided you have at least 256MB of main memory.

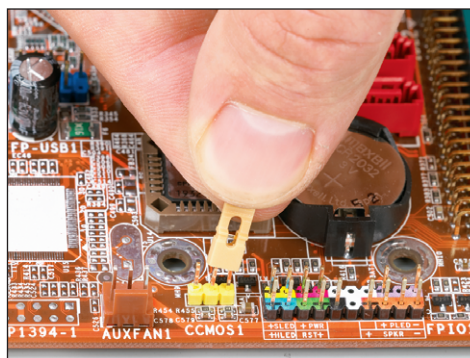
Some experts suggest setting the aperture size to half the main memory regardless of the amount of memory on the VGA card. The system will use only the amount of memory an application needs, so a large aperture size will not reduce the memory available to applications when you aren't playing graphics-intensive games. However, this will slightly increase the size of the graphics address remapping table (GART), which is used to look up how this area of memory is being used. It wouldn't make sense to set an aperture size larger than the amount of memory installed on your system,

and we would not recommend setting it to more than half your total system memory size.

Setting a large aperture size should not stop the system booting. The only reason aperture size could prevent the system booting is that some AGP cards crash if they are not given a minimum aperture size of 16MB. Perhaps you changed some other AGP settings as well? Or perhaps this is a weird bug in your motherboard or AGP card BIOS.

Whatever the cause, the only way out is to disconnect the power and look for a CMOS reset jumper on your motherboard. This is usually a three-pin jumper located near the round CMOS battery. Usually, the jumper is on pins one and two (marked Normal) and you need to move it to pins two and three (marked Reset). This disconnects the battery that maintains CMOS memory values and shorts out the CMOS to discharge its contents.

Leave it at Reset for a minute or so, then put the jumper back in the normal position and turn on the PC. The CMOS should be reset to its default values.



▲ Place the jumper on the Reset pins to reset the CMOS and restore the motherboard's default settings

YOUR EXPERTS

HELPFILE

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Paul Mullen

With 27 years of PC experience as power user, programmer and IT consultant, Paul Mullen answers all PC problems, tackling hardware, system and security issues.



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SOFTWARE HELP 228

Kay Ewbank

Database developer and productivity expert Kay Ewbank offers help with office applications.



Ben Pitt

Professional musician and photo enthusiast Ben Pitt gives advice on using creative software.



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BUYING HELP

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Tom Royal

Labs Editor Tom Royal recommends the best products for your specific requirements.



David Ludlow

If the product you need exists, Reviews Editor David Ludlow knows where you can buy it.



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BUSINESS HELP 234

Simon Edwards

Web developer and security expert Simon Edwards provides IT solutions to your business goals.



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Please try to give full details of your problem. We need an email address or daytime and evening telephone numbers in case we need more information.

Although the policy of *Computer Shopper* is not to publish readers' email addresses, we include them in Help so that other readers with experience of similar problems can share their solution (please also cc any comments to the relevant Help department above). If you would prefer not to have your email address published, please say so.

I can't send a fax using Windows Fax Console

Q I have configured Windows' Fax Console, and according to Control Panel the fax is ready to send and receive. But when I try to send a fax, a message pops up that says "plug the phone line in to your modem".

Although I have a broadband internet connection with a 1Mbit/s speed and apparently everything is in place, I'm still unable to run the fax console. Do you have any idea why this is happening?

Reza Parsi, reza.parsi@yahoo.co.uk

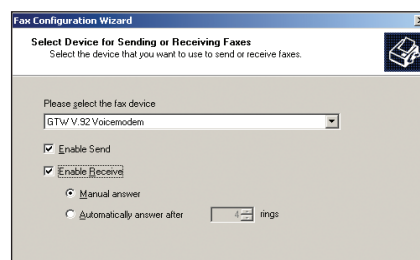
A Have you plugged your modem into a phone line? The fax software is referring to the dial-up modem in your computer and not to the DSL modem, which usually can't send faxes. To fax directly from your computer, as opposed to using an internet-based fax service such as eFax, you

need a fax-capable modem connected to a plain old-fashioned phone line. Most 56K modems are capable of sending and receiving faxes.

If you have DSL, you must also have a working phone line. The software seems to have found a suitable modem in your computer, so you just need to connect the modem to the telephone socket on the wall. As with any telephone equipment, make sure that you plug the fax modem in to a filtered socket and not the socket into which your DSL modem connects, otherwise your fax could interfere with your DSL connection.

Most modems have two sockets: one to connect to the line and another that allows you to plug in a telephone. Make sure that you are using the socket marked Line, not the Extension or Phone socket.

If you have connected a phone line to the correct modem and it still can't detect the dial



▲ Select the dial-up modem installed on your system to be able to send and receive faxes

tone, it may be the phone line is in use or you have a non-standard dial tone that the modem does not recognise. If you subscribe to a voicemail service such as BT's 1571 Call Minder, bear in mind that these usually change the dial tone when messages are waiting which can prevent your modem recognising the dial tone.

Partitions on a notebook hard disk

Q I have an Acer notebook with an 80GB hard disk, which is split into 40GB (the C: drive) and 40GB (the D: drive). The C: drive is getting full, so I tried installing a new program on the D: drive. It seemed to install OK, but running it is a different matter. Short cuts don't work, for a start. What is going on, and why is the disk partitioned into two 40GB drives instead of one 80GB drive?

Graham, u2ok@grahams.fsnet.co.uk

A Most Acer computers come with the hard disk divided into two equal partitions, plus a small diagnostics partition. A lot of people like it that way, as it enables them to keep files separate from the operating system and programs, and so makes it easier to back up. At one time it was common to set up Windows NT computers with a 4GB or 8GB 'system' partition, and then put all the data on the next partition. That enabled administrators to format the system partition routinely and do a clean reinstall of Windows without affecting data. Hard disks also used to be formatted with FAT32, which can be read by both Windows XP and older versions of Windows. FAT32 is not designed for use on partitions much larger than 32GB.

A well-designed software application should have no problems being installed on the D: drive or anywhere else you care to place it. Unfortunately, badly written programs are far too common. When testing beta programs years ago, I deliberately tested installing them on a different drive from the default suggested, because I had found so many programs where the programmers had never tested installing it anywhere other than the default path. You can change the short cuts and edit the Registry to point to the correct location, but it would be easier to reinstall your software on C:.

The biggest concern is that if your C: drive is nearly full, it will quickly become fragmented and this will seriously slow down the system.

NTFS is good at minimising the number of fragmented files, but it can do that only if there is plenty of free space on the drive. Ideally, you would have a third of the drive free. In particular, the Windows swap file will become fragmented, which has a serious impact on performance.

Even worse would be if the Master File Table (MFT), which stores information about every file on the drive, becomes fragmented. This has such a huge effect on drive performance that NTFS reserves the disk space immediately following the MFT into which it can expand. The default size of this MFT Zone is 12.5 per cent of the drive, which is usually way too large. This reserved area is still part of your free disk space. Windows starts to use this space for user files when it has filled up the rest of the drive. But once a drive gets this full, your MFT will start to become fragmented.

PARTITION MAGIC

The large amount of space reserved for the MFT zone makes general fragmentation a far greater problem. For example, if 20 per cent of the drive is free space and 12.5 per cent is reserved for the MFT zone, Windows will try to place all new files in the remaining 7.5 per cent of the drive, which quickly becomes fragmented.

Your options are either to change the partition size, using a tool such as Partition Commander, or move a substantial amount of data to the D: drive. While partition resizing utilities tend to be reliable, there is always the danger that an error on your hard disk or a power glitch may cause things to go wrong. Therefore, you should resize the partition only after making a complete backup of the drive.

I prefer to use utilities such as Acronis True Image or Norton Ghost to copy the partition and then, after verifying the copy, delete the partition. Recreate the partition using the utility to restore the data.

If your 40GB C: partition is nearly full, you must have a lot of data on it. On my notebook Windows takes just over 2GB and the programs

use 4GB. The hidden system recovery files can take up quite a lot of space. You can reduce this if you right-click My Computer, choose Properties and open System Restore.

The Windows swap or paging file, which defaults to the C: drive, can also be large. Temporary files take up another large chunk of disk space, especially if you don't clean them out regularly. Even so, this probably won't use more than 10GB, so the rest must be data. Your best bet is to move all or a large part of the data to drive D:. Unfortunately, Windows XP likes to put data under the Documents and Settings folder, which, by default, is on the system drive. Moving the whole of the Documents and Settings folder is not a good idea. Too many badly written programs may expect to find it on the Windows drive. If one application accounts for a lot of the data – an MP3 player application such as iTunes may do – you could tell just that application to store its data on D:.

Otherwise, you may wish to move the My Documents folder to the D: drive. This is simple. Just right-click on the My Documents icon, which is usually on your desktop or in the Start menu, and choose Properties. This window shows the current location and has a Move button beneath it. Click on Move, navigate to your D: drive and click the Make New Folder button to create your folder. Call it something like Graham's Documents, then click OK to return to the My Documents Properties window.

When you click on Apply, it will offer to move your existing documents to the new folder. Once you have your data spread more evenly over the two drives, we strongly recommend that you defragment the C: drive. The Windows built-in defrag program has some limitations, but you can always use this and then try a free utility called PageDefrag from www.sysinternals.com, which will defragment the Windows swap file and Registry. Alternatively, if you want the best defragmenter program available, try Diskeeper Home edition, which costs £23 including VAT from www.diskeepereurope.com.

Laptop memory upgrade

Q I would like to upgrade the memory on my laptop from the present 128MB to 512MB. It is a Compaq Armada M700 series PP2040. What sort of memory should I purchase?
Carl Herrmann, carl124.herrmann@virgin.net

A My usual advice is to visit www.crucial.com/uk, where you will find the excellent Memory Advisor tool. Select the make and model of your computer and, in most cases, it will tell you what memory your system can use.

Unfortunately, your laptop is one of the few computers it doesn't list, perhaps because there were so many different models of the M700, each with different motherboards and processors. Neither does the Compaq/HP website have much useful information about appropriate memory for each series. The PartSurfer service (<http://partsurfer.hp.com>) requires a model code of six digits followed by a dash and three more digits to determine which modules will fit.

Other websites give conflicting information, perhaps because they are talking about different models. There even appear to be different models

labelled PP2040, some of which have Pentium II processors while others are Pentium III-based.

I think that you can install two 256MB PC100 SODIMM modules, but if your computer has a Pentium II processor, be careful. Many Pentium II systems can only use 128MB modules.

Your best bet is to take the notebook to a repair shop, where they will be able to see which memory you need. To add memory to an M700 you have to raise the keyboard by pushing the four small tabs along the top edge towards you. The keyboard then folds back to reveal two memory slots. Do not damage the ribbon cable.

Can I use a PSU from overseas?

Q I've decided I'm going to build a computer using components that I will buy from Taiwan because I travel there often. This computer will be used in the UK. If all the components, such as the motherboard, CPU, RAM, case, hard disk and so on are bought in Taiwan, can I buy the PSU in Taiwan, too, or do I have to buy one in the UK? I fear there will be some electrical compatibility issues.
Brian Yu, brianyu0717@msn.com

A The airline might moan about the weight of your luggage! Check the specifications of the PSU. As long as it supports 230V 50Hz AC, you should be fine. I think Taiwan uses a US-style 110V 60Hz supply with US plugs, but most of the power supplies that Taiwanese companies make – even those sold in the USA – have a switch on the back to convert to a voltage close to 230V.

You will have to replace the plug with a UK one. Just be careful that the voltage switch is in

the correct position before plugging in. A list of the standards used in each country are available at www.powerstream.com/cv.htm.

On arrival in Britain, you may need to go through the red channel and pay import duty and VAT on anything above your duty-free allowance, which is currently \$145 (around £83) of goods and gifts other than alcohol, perfume and cigarettes. Keep receipts available as proof of value. The Customs Officer could choose to use his own estimate of the goods' value.

DVD drive won't work

Q My HP notebook has suddenly stopped recognising its DVD drive. This happened after I removed a virus. When I open Device Manager, there is a yellow exclamation mark against the DVD drive and it says, "Successfully loaded device driver but cannot find hardware (Code 41)". I deleted the driver and allowed Windows to reinstall it, but the same problem recurs.
Bryan Williams

A This and a number of other error codes can happen to a DVD or CD-RW drive if something has damaged one of the filter drivers. These are referred to in the Registry as Upper Filter and Lower Filter drivers. They may be installed by CD-writing software such as Roxio's Easy CD, DVD players such as PowerDVD or by music-related programs such as Musicmatch Jukebox.

Microsoft describes the problem in Knowledge Base article 314060 at <http://support.microsoft.com/?id=314060>. The article implies that the problem is caused only by Roxio software, but the error can occur with any type of CD-writing or DVD software.

Error messages that may occur when you try to access your CD or DVD drive include:

- Windows cannot start this hardware device because its configuration information (in the Registry) is incomplete or damaged. (Code 19)
- This device is not working properly because Windows cannot load the drivers required for this device. (Code 31)

- A driver (service) for this device has been disabled. An alternate driver may be providing this functionality. (Code 32)
- Windows cannot load the device driver for this hardware. The driver may be corrupted or missing. (Code 39)
- Windows successfully loaded the device driver for this hardware but cannot find the hardware device. (Code 41)

There are other causes for these and similar messages. The fix below applies mainly to CD or DVD drives. For other explanations, see <http://support.microsoft.com/?id=310123>.

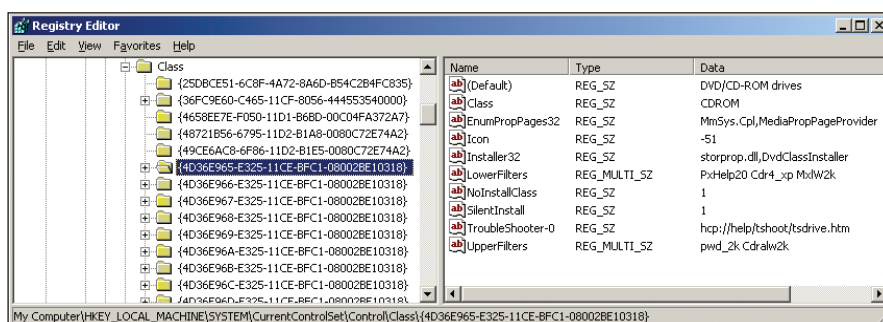
Sometimes uninstalling and then reinstalling CD-writing and DVD software may cure the problem but in other cases, like yours, it is necessary to edit the Registry to fix it. Before editing the Registry, it is wise to make a backup,

either by using Windows XP System Restore to create a restore point or by exporting the keys from the Registry editor.

Run RegEdit and click on the '+' signs to expand and highlight the following keys:

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SYSTEM, CurrentControlSet, Control, Class, {4D36E965-E325-11CE-BFC1-08002BE10318}

If you want to export a copy of the values, select File and Export and enter a suitable filename. In the right window, you should find keys called UpperFilters and LowerFilters as below. Highlight each of these in turn and click Delete. After exiting the Registry Editor, you should be able to access your CD or DVD drive again. You may need to reinstall software that accesses the drive, such as CD writers and DVD players.



▲ Delete the UpperFilters and LowerFilters keys to remove troublesome settings. You may have to reinstall your CD-writing and DVD-playing software afterwards

Second hard disk is not recognised

Q I have a six-month-old computer that has a 40GB Maxtor DiamondPlus hard disk. I have added an 80GB Maxtor DiamondPlus hard disk as a slave to the original drive on the same UDMA cable. The problem is that the BIOS does not detect the new drive.

I know that the drive is OK because I have formatted it using FDisk. If I disconnect the first drive and put the new drive on to the master cable connector, the BIOS detects it correctly. However, if I put it on to the slave cable connector, it will not. I have changed the cable for another new one, but it makes no difference.

Bryan Mitchell, bryan1931@tiscali.co.uk

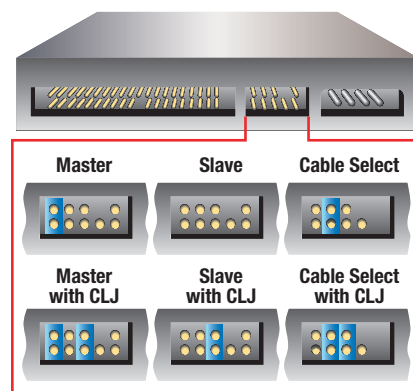
A It could be a bad IDE cable connector, or a bad power connector if you changed either when you made the drive a master. The most likely cause, though, is incorrect jumper settings. To work on the same cable, one drive has to be the master and the other the slave. Most recent drives come with

their jumper set to Cable Select, which should automatically make the drive at the end of the cable the master and the one on the middle connector the slave.

However, this only works if your cable and motherboard both support this feature, and you have to have plugged the correct end of the cable (usually with a blue connector) into the motherboard. On older systems, which come with 40-pin IDE cables, few computers except Compaq supported Cable Select. Now most 80-pin IDE cables, and motherboards designed for use with them, support Cable Select. But sometimes this simply does not work well.

If it does not seem to be working, change the jumpers on both drives to manually configure one drive as the master and the other as the slave. When you use jumpers to select the master and slave settings, it does not matter which drive is plugged into the end connector. On some drives, including most Western Digital drives, the jumper setting for a master with a slave attached is different to the jumper position for a master drive on its own.

The jumper settings may be shown on the drive label, or you may have to go to the firm's website. Maxtor drives generally use the jumper layout, shown in the image below. CLJ stands for capacity limitation jumper and is only used when a PC doesn't support the full size of the disk.



▲ Use a hard disk's jumpers to configure its master/slave status if Cable Select doesn't work

Disk repartitioning woes

Q Following a low-level format of an 80GB Maxtor drive, using the downloaded utility from Maxtor, I installed Windows XP Professional using an NTFS partition for the whole drive. I intended to partition it up into smaller bits later using a partitioning utility.

I started to install all my programs, set up the broadband and downloaded the latest updates from the Microsoft site. I then decided to partition the hard disk, but I had only Partition Magic 6, which apparently has issues with NTFS and Windows XP. So I dug out an old free disc I got with *Computer Shopper* June 2003 and used Partition Manager 2000.

I set the program to divide the hard disk into three partitions. It stated that it needed to reboot to carry out the task. It went into a continuous reboot loop and I could not break out of it. I tried going into Safe Mode, but it rebooted again before getting that far.

At that point, I looked at the Partition Manager 2000 disc again and saw, in the top-right corner, some ticks by Windows 95, 98, NT and 2000, but an X by Windows XP. Just

my luck. Is there any way to rescue it, or should I just start all over again? There were no files on it yet, but it would be a pain going through the whole installation process again.

In the good old days of Windows 98 and Me, I would have copied the whole drive to an old hard disk and put it away in a drawer until I managed to corrupt the working copy. Then I would just reinstall it all from the backup drive. But Windows XP won't let me do this. (I am willing to stand corrected on this.)

I also use Lian-Li removable drive caddies and have other drives to plug in and use, so I'm not exactly stuck. However, lesson learned: read the small print on free discs.

Michael McGreevy, mje.gravy@virgin.net

A Repartitioning hard disks is a dangerous business and I don't recommend it. Resized partitions may not be optimised in the way a fresh partition would be. It is essential to use utilities designed for the operating systems and drive sizes that you are using. Partition Magic 6 is very old now; the latest version is 8.01. I doubt if a two-year-old copy of any partition manager would be reliable

on today's large drives. Many of these utilities had a 128GB limit.

Since no partition manager can work while Windows is using the drive, they all have to boot the PC from their own operating system in order to do the repartitioning. Let's assume Partition Manager has changed some startup settings so it boots its own system instead of following the usual Windows XP boot-up process NTLOADER, which is the same as Windows 2000's. The most likely way to do this would be to write a non-standard boot sector, add an entry to the boot.ini file or modify the Master Partition Table to boot.

We would boot from your Windows XP CD and run the Recovery Console to find out if this can see the C: partition. If it can, try the following commands in the order given: diskpart, chkdisk c:, fixmbr, fixboot and bootcfg /rebuild. If those don't fix it, start afresh and reformat using the partition sizes you want. Microsoft has been making it harder to back up a working installation of Windows with every version of its operating system. You now need a third-party tool to make practical backups. When you have a working drive arranged, use Acronis True Image to make a copy of the entire partition.

USB and broadband router

Q I have a BT ADSL modem with a USB and an Ethernet connector. In 'Your Complete Guide to Wireless', *Shopper* September 2005, you mention that if your modem used USB you would buy a modem/router and ditch the modem. But what if it has both, like the BT Voyager 200 Router does? Will it take a router?

Mark Thomas, m@rktthomas.com

A If your ADSL modem has an Ethernet connector as well as USB, you can buy a simple, cheap broadband router with or without wireless. A simple four-port cable/DSL router, without wireless, costs about £32.

The Voyager 200 already incorporates a router but you can still connect another router, as you might want to do to add wireless. If you just want to add other computers to a wired

network, a simple network switch would do just as well. You can also connect two computers by using both the USB and Ethernet ports.

Incidentally, if your ADSL modem has Ethernet as well as USB, you should use the Ethernet port even if you aren't using a router. The USB drivers will often impose a significant load on the CPU and most new computers have an Ethernet port.

File problems with PC Optimiser

Q Several months ago I got a disc containing PC Optimiser and ran the Registry cleaner (with my fingers crossed). It found lots of apparently surplus entries, which it threw away with no noticeable bad effects. To tell the truth, there were no apparent good effects either, but I felt good about having had a good tidy-up and thrown out lots of useless bits of information from my computer.

After that, I hesitated to try any further cleaning, but this week I decided I was just being cowardly and ran 'Clean Junk files'. I was amazed at the huge list of files it found, which it recommended I throw away. Luckily, it offered the option of throwing them into the Recycle Bin. My first doubts arose while the files were being moved to the Bin, as the transfer kept stopping and displaying a little message that said "cannot move this file as it is in use by another program". If this file is classed as being redundant, why on earth is it being used in a computer that is doing very little?

Everything seemed to be OK, until I tried to open a file using Microsoft Office. It refused to run, and said it was short of a file that it could not find. It specified the filename as SKU011.CAB. I checked in the

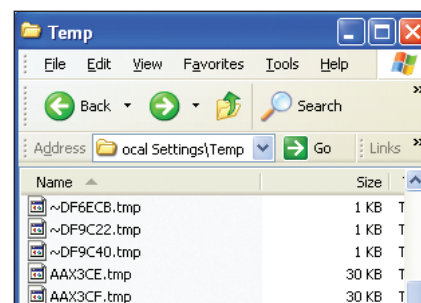
Recycle Bin to look through the great list of files. There was no such file, nor anything like it, in sight.

I restored all the files from the Recycle Bin back where they came from. Everything now works fine, but where do I go from here? I know lots of files were shown as empty and others had a tilde (~) in front of them, which I think means they aren't much help in the computer world, but I'm not sure of that.

Ron Swinden, ron@ronswinden.wanadoo.co.uk

A Anything that cleans out your Registry and hard disk of 'surplus' material is inherently dangerous and, as you have found, usually makes little difference to performance. Provided you have plenty of space on your hard disk, having extra files on it won't slow things down significantly. You should just keep at least 20 per cent of space free on any NTFS drive to avoid having too many fragmented files. New hard disks are relatively cheap, if you need more space. A good-quality clean-up utility should also have its own backup area, where it stores items removed until you are sure their removal doesn't cause problems.

The need to clean out the Registry is less urgent in Windows XP than it was in Windows 98. Windows 95 and 98 would slow down



▲ Files that begin with a tilde (~), and those that end in .tmp, are almost always safe to delete

significantly as you added more programs, since the operating system always loaded the entire Registry into memory. Windows XP loads only the parts of the Registry it needs and keeps unused portions in the swap file. With this and other improvements, Windows XP hardly ever has problems caused by Registry size. However, you may notice a decrease in startup time if you optimise or compact the Registry files. The biggest increases in performance will come from removing unnecessary programs and services from startup and from defragmenting your hard disk. However, filenames starting with a tilde or the .tmp extension are almost always temporary files that can be cleaned out without problems.

Ancient traveller

Q I have a Compaq Armada 1130 notebook. I know it is ancient and well past its sell-by date. However, it still works well, and is relatively small and light compared to my Toshiba Satellite laptop.

I have had the notion of loading Linux on to the Armada. My question is this: with a 4GB hard drive and 16MB memory, will the Armada run Linux? Will I also be able to add a WiFi PCMCIA card and use it to access the internet through hotspots while travelling in the United States?

Finally, will Linux on the Armada support a PCMCIA USB port card?

Bill Weston, PassimC@aol.com

A Your Armada will run Linux, though we doubt if 16MB of memory is enough to run all the latest GUI add-ons. If memory serves, this system has a 120MHz Pentium processor and its PCMCIA slot will support only 16-bit PCMCIA cards, not the 32-bit Cardbus cards, which were introduced in 1997.

Your first problem is finding a 16-bit wireless adaptor. They exist, but they are hard to find. You

will also need to find an adaptor that has Linux drivers available. Try the original Orinoco Classic Gold adaptors. This same problem means you won't find a USB adaptor card to fit your computer. USB cards are all 32-bit.

While many airports and cafés charge for wireless access, free WiFi hotspots are available in any big city throughout the USA. I found recently that whenever I stopped my car in a residential area of a medium-sized or large US city and turned on my computer, nine times out of 10 I would have been able to connect to at least one unsecured wireless network.

Firefox plug-in problems

Q I have version 1.5 of the Firefox browser. QuickTime works properly with Internet Explorer, but Firefox says that QuickTime is unavailable. What's more, if I try to access my bank or Mozilla.org add-ons, the screen says: "Error establishing an encrypted connection, error code 8075." Internet Explorer works properly.

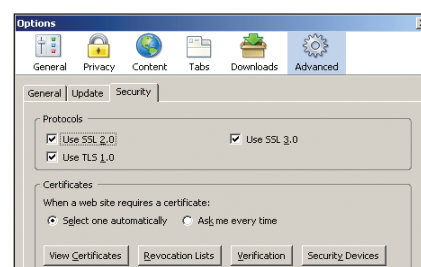
Firefox updates don't work either, giving an error message such as, "AUS: Update XML File Malformed (200)". What might the problem be?

Paul James, p-james@blueyonder.co.uk

A Firefox requires different plug-ins to Internet Explorer. If you want to enable plug-ins for QuickTime, Flash,

PDFs and so on, you need to install them. I suspect your other problems were stopping their automatic installation. Most people don't see these problems, so something is messed up in your installation of Firefox. The error establishing an encrypted connection seems to suggest that there is a problem with your security settings. This in turn could be causing the strange update error message.

Select Tools, Options, Advanced, then click the Security tab. Make sure all the protocols are checked. Then click on the Verification button and make sure 'Do not use OCSP for certificate verification' is selected; this is the default setting. There could also be a problem with your cryptographic services, which handle the encoding of secure transmissions.



▲ Tick every protocol in the list to make sure that Firefox can connect to all websites

If that fails, remove the Firefox installation completely, then delete any file folders relating to it manually. Reboot and download the latest Firefox from www.mozilla.com. ☞